My Adventures with Thomas

Thomas was a character I got to know when I was a student in Durban. I first met Thomas at the pits in the university residence car park. I had been having problems with the driveshaft bearing on my BMW. Mike Kosch had helped me dismantle the car. The day I got the required bearings, Mike was busy and could not help me. On the pits next to my car was an Alfa 1750, which I knew belonged to one of my fellow residents in Ansell May Hall - a law student called Gavin. Parked by the pits was a black and yellow Valiant Barracuda. I had seen it at the pits before, one day on a previous occasion when I had been there putting SAE 90 into my diff, which was leaking oil at the time. While I was doing this, Amos had arrived and was talking to me. Amos Tabette was a Zulu who worked in the university gardens. I had often encountered him at different places on the campus while on my way between different parts of the university, and we had got to know each other, since I would stop and talk to him when I saw him. I had difficulty understanding most of what he said, because he could hardly speak English, and my Zulu was not too good either. He was also into cars, and had a dark brown Chev V8. Amos told me that the Barracuda was owned by two brothers, and that they had had an accident in it in Durban North, while being chased by the police.

A blonde chap, covered in oil arrived while I was working on my drive shaft. He offered to help me, and I accepted his offer. He told me that he was working on the Alfa. He introduced himself as Tom. He told me that he was working for Gavin, fixing his car, and that he had nowhere to stay, and slept in his car, the Barracuda. The Barracuda was quite a car. Due to the accident, the front wheels seemed to each go their own way. To add to this the tyres were so smooth the canvas showed through in patches. This combination made the car wander all over the road. The tyres squealed when ever they touched white paint on the road due to the alignment problem. The inside of the car was full of all sorts of interesting things, pieces of cars, tools, empty bottles, old clothes,... .

It took me a while to understand some of the things that he said. He used some strange words, and some words that I knew in ways I had not known them to be used before. He also used the word "fuck", and its derivatives all over his sentances. He came out with expressions like "Coolies kleppie" and "Do you sharp American cabbies?" He categorised people into types like saffgoers, palookers, outsiders and real bad okes.

He told me the story of the accident. He and his brother, Pete, were on their way back from a party at the DHS Old Boy's Club in Durban North. They were both very drunk, and Pete was driving. Just after crossing the Athlone Bridge,

they encountered a police roadblock. They were stopped, and told to wait on the side of the road, their state being obvious to the police. While the police were away from the Barracuda doing something, Tom decided that he must rescue his brother from getting caught for drunken driving. He grabbed him, and pulled him out of the driving seat, pushing him into the back seat. Tom took the controls and drove off as fast as possible along NMR Avenue towards Durban. The police pursued. On approaching a red light at an intersection, Tom skidded while braking, and crashed over the island in the centre of the road, wrecking the front suspension of the Barracuda. They were arrested, and taken to jail. Tom showed me the endorsement which had been put on his licence for drunken driving, it included the blood alcohol level he was caught with. Some mechanics told him that the car was written off, the damage to the suspension being irrepairable, but he managed to find a jippo mechanic who welded it together for him.

From his stories, I found out quite a bit about him. He had been born in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). His parents, from Germany were in that country, since his father, a civil engineer, was working on a mine there. When he was only a few years old they moved to Durban. He went to school at DHS. At some stage his mother had taken out South African citizenship for him, which made him eligable for national service. After he finished school, he left the country, and went to Germany to avoid being called-up for the army. He did not remain in Germany for very long, the lifestyle did not suit him, everybody there worked too hard. He had a few jobs, like working in a factory assembling cameras, and washing dishes in a hotel. He associated more with the American soldiers than anyone else. Tom told me the one German person he worked with washing dishes was rather strange. The one night when there were a lot of dishes to wash, this workmate suggested that he and Thomas just smash the dishes so that they did not have to wash them. They did this. I think that the job did not last for very long after this. Thomas returned to South Africa, where he was grabbed by the military. He ended up joining the air force for his national service, where he was training to be an aircraft mechanic. One weekend when he was on leave in Durban from his base in Petersburg, he was arrested by the MP's for being AWOL. On the train on the way back to Petersburg, he managed to lock the MP's up with their own handcuffs, and escape from them. He was recaptured, and courtmartialed. He did some time in DB, and was then dishonorably discharged. Having a dishonorable discharge from the military in South Africa was the equivalent of having a criminal record as far as social standing went. It made it very difficult for him to get a job. The only real job he had had in South Africa was working for Barclays Bank for a short period.

Soon after I met him I met a friend of his called Shirley. She arrived at the pits one evening with some food for him. He had met her a few years before when they were both staying in the same hotel. Her car had broken down one evening, and she had come into the dining room seeking assistance, and Tom had offered to help her.

He smoked cigarettes called Gold Dollars when he could afford to buy them, since these were the cheapest available, due to the fact that as well as being a cheap brand, they were the only cigarettes available in packs of ten. However,

he was not fussy about what he smoked, he would ask anybody for a cigarette, and smoke whatever they gave him. I discovered that some of his favourite activities were driving along the beachfront, and going to the drive-in. The first time I went to the drive-in with him, it was to the Durban Drive-In. His method of financing a trip to the drive-in was to go up to the beer club in one of the residences and collect some empty bottles. We then set off, with the bottles rattling around in the Barracuda, and stopped off at a few cafes on the way, trading in a few bottles at each one. I cannot recall the films that we saw, but I do remember that we ran out of petrol on the way back. It was just after where the Berea off-ramp comes off the N3. Thomas said that this was no problem, he would just go and syphon some gas. I did not believe that anybody would just give him some petrol. Anyway, he got an oil can and a piece of green hosepipe out of the back of the car, and walked off toward a take-away food place on Berea Road. A short while later he returned with some petrol, and we were on the road again. Another thing he used to do, was go to a petrol station and wait until somebody came to fill up their car, and then ask them to put a litre or two into his can while they were at it.

It was through Tom's dealing with Gavin that I met John Haynes. Ever since I had been in res, I had noticed that there were a number of old wrecks parked in the res students car park: the ones that I remember were a Renault 4, a Mazda 616, and a Fiat. Gavin got the idea that using Tom's skills as a mechanic, he could make some money by getting Tom to fix the cars so that he could sell them. Gavin set about trying to find the owners of the various cars in the car park, as well as working on some scheme he had for claiming ownership of the cars. Gavin was a senior law student, and seemed to know some tricks that he could use to get ownership of the cars, and had placed some notices on the cars stating that he was claiming them since they had been abandoned on his property - he was a student in residence, and paid the university rent for space in the car park. Gavin discovered that all of these cars were owned by the same person, and this person was called John Haynes. Having found these notices on his cars, John was trying to get his cars out of the car park. This was difficult due to the fact that none of them were mobile. While John was doing something to one of his cars, Gavin arrived and started talking to him. He asked John to sign some scrap of paper, which John did, thinking that it was some sort of joke.

I happened to arrive in the car park just after John managed to get the Mazda going. That was the first time that I saw John, I saw him getting into the car, and driving it out of the car park. That same afternoon, I accompanied Tom and Gavin to the Cato Manor police station to report that Gavin had had his car stolen. What Gavin had got John to sign on that scrap of paper was some sort of contract giving ownership of the car to Gavin, so legally the car was his, and John was stealing it by driving off in it. I knew very little about this Haynes fellow, and thought it very funny that he was being charged with car theft for driving off in his own car. The policeman was asking the usual set of questions, and when he got to the one asking how long the car had been parked at the place from which it was stolen, and the answer that Gavin gave to this was "About three years". I could no longer stop myself from laughing. I took a few steps back from the counter, leant against the wall, and tried to pretend that I was just having a coughing fit.

John Haynes in one of his cars

Gavin's attempts to obtain John's cars did not work out. However, he did manage to buy some other cars which Tom fixed up, and they sold. One of these was a Mazda 1000 pickup. I helped Thomas overhaul the engine on this one. I learnt some tricks like packing bearings with tinfoil instead of replacing them. He had also drained the oil out of the engine and kept it, to put it back after he had finished overhauling the engine. Another car was a small Fiat of some sort. I went to Amanzimtoti with Thomas to collect this one. I had taken him there in my BMW, and remember that I had to stop a few times on the way back to help him, since the car kept breaking down. While helping him fix up the Fiat, I was shown the trick of reducing the noise in a noisy gearbox with banana peels. Thomas was eating bananas, and shoving the peels into the oil filler on the gearbox.

A short while after I met him, Shirley found him a room where he could stay. It was in the back garden of the house of two old people, when I say "old", I mean really OLD! They were the grandparents of some friend of Shirley. (They were also the grandparents of Brian Baronet, the boxer). The rent for this was R10 per month. With rent at such a rate, Thomas was usually a few months behind in his payments during the time that he stayed there. It was a very small room, which contained a cupboard, of sorts, which had a curtain instead of a door, and an old bed that had a door under the mattress, due to the fact that the springs were so shot. There was a shower and toilet in another building also in the back garden. There was no hot water in this setup. He used the showers at the university cricket pavilion for his occasional ablutions, as he had done while living in the car park. Shortly after he moved in there a cat moved in with him. Thomas was also a cat person. She was a tortoise shell cat, who never seemed to get given a name. In order to make the place a bit more comfortable, Shirley had lent him a carpet for the room. One morning Tom had woken up, taken the carpet out and sold it. When asked why he did this,

Thomas, waiting for someone to score him some gas

he said "Well, I just woke up in the morning, and schemed, like what's more important, Shirley's carpet or breakfast?"

One evening when I went to the computer room in Shepstone building to work on a programming assignment, Thomas came with me. It was in the days of punch cards, so running the program entailed punching the cards, one card for each line of the program, submitting the job by adding the job control cards to the deck and putting it in the card reader machine, and then waiting for the result to come out on the printer. If the program did not work, then it had to be edited by punching more cards to replace the incorrect lines in the program and swapping the appropriate cards in the deck. When I sat at a card punch machine, he sat there next to me, and lit up a cigarette (one of his Gold Dollars). I pointed out to him that there were "NO SMOKING" signs all over the place, and explained to him that the smoke was bad for the computer equipment. He chose to just ignore what I had said and the signs, and carried on smoking, while looking around and saying "These fucking okes and chicks here scheme that they are so fucking larney just because they are sitting here punching holes in fucking pieces of paper."

One rainy night Thomas came to my room asking me to help him to tow start the Fiat, which the purchaser had returned due to some problem. When I asked him why it had to be tow started, and could not just be jump started, or push started, he was rather vague, and insisted that he had to tow start it. I went along to help him. I was in the Fiat, and he towed with the Barracuda, and we headed off down Francois Road. Thomas had told me not to try starting

it until we were doing about 50. I attempted at a speed much lower than that. When I let the clutch out the wheels just seemed to lock, and I skidded all over the road. After the second attempt of letting the clutch out, I realised that there was some serious problem, like the engine was seized. This was in fact the case. Thomas was just going faster, so I steered into the curb in order to break the tow rope. He was rather annoyed at me for doing this. He admitted that the engine was seized, and insisted that towing it like that was the way to unseize it. A day or two later while talking to Julius, one of my colleagues in my Physics class, I discovered that I was the second victim of the night, Thomas had come looking for me after Julius had refused further assistance after he had been towed down Francois Road in the Fiat with a seized engine.

One night we went to the Durban Drive-In, one of the films we saw was Revenge of the Ninja. As we were leaving, driving out through the exit under the screen, the Barracuda packed in on us, and would not start again. Suddenly, the car started moving! It was the security guard helping us, as we thought, by giving us a push. In fact all he was doing was getting us out of the way so that he could shut the gate. We could not get the car going again. Eventually we went across to the police station to ask for help. They were not very helpful, and Thomas got barked at by a big police dog. Thomas had an intense dislike for dogs, and did not like the police very much either - so a combination of the two, a police dog, being so rude to him was very nasty. In the end we left the Barracuda outside the police station, after pushing it across the road, and started to walk home. Thomas managed to score us a ride with a truck driver, in a big Mercedes truck, a short part of the way, from the corner of Field and Old Fort, to the corner of St Andrews and Warwick. I had further than him to walk, since he was staying in Clark Grove at the time.

The following morning I took a Golf GTS out for a demo, and saw the Barracuda still where we left it at around 11h00. Later I saw Tom at the pits with the car, he said that it had been a carburettor problem, and he had managed to fix it in the afternoon.

When Amos had had some problems with his car he had asked Thomas to fix it. Amos was very unimpressed when Thomas used a brick to hit something during the repair procedure. I was there at the time. This episode was remembered by Amos a long time afterwards, when I was talking to him at a bus stop one day, and a Corrobrick truck drove past. Amos pointed to it and said "Thomas, hammers." He went on to make the comment "Thomas not good mechanic. Say 'fuck it, fuck it', and hit it with a blick."

Thomas had somehow got to know Dave de Lange, who lived with his mother in the house of an old woman called Aunt Peggie. De Lange was also one of those people with a fleet of old wrecks. The house was just off Nicolson Road, and I suspect Thomas had met him when passing on his way between his place and the university, and de Lange was working on one of his wrecks on the side of the road. It was after he had been out drinking with de Lange that he arrived at my res room pissed out of his mind, just as I was about to go to supper. I did not trust him in that state to stay in my room while I went to supper, so took him with me when I went.

At the dining hall he pushed in near the front of the queue, and then stood next to some female student and annoyed her by smoking and blowing smoke in her face. I did my best to ignore him. She was getting very angry and kept asking him to stop it. He just laughed and carried on. Since he had pushed in in the queue he was a few places in front of me in the servery, and I was relieved that he was no longer with me. I was fairly well known by the Fedics staff, and did not want them associating this character with me. I was watching him, wondering what he was going to do when he got to the end of the place, where it was either show your card or pay. He just walked out doing neither, and nobody seemed to notice. When I got out to the cutlery table, he was there waiting for me. He picked up a knife and was waving it around saying "How's scheme like I take this fucking knife and stab that fucking chick who was tuning me shit just now" referring to the one who was getting upset while having smoke blown in her face. I told him that that was not a good idea. The dining room was very crowded that evening. I found a space at a table, and Tom came and sat opposite me. He started eating very quickly. Suddenly he just stopped eating. He had a pale greenish tinge to his face, and just sat there looking straight ahead for a short while. Then he turned to the left and vomited all over the floor. I got up from the table, and took my tray to the used tray rack, abandoning the rest of my dinner there. Tom caught up with me outside Charles James Hall, he had obviously just left everything at the table, and exited right behind me. He was laughing and talking nonsense, and grabbed hold of me. I pushed him down the slope there, he rolled down and landed in the flower bed. He climbed up covered in mud. He seemed a bit more sensible, and decided that he must go home. I walked with him to his car. He got into it and just sat there for a while. I was sure that he could not drive in the state he was in, but he insisted that he could, he tuned me cheers and left. The next morning when he woke up he did not remember how he had got home. He went out to his car and found it parked half on the pavement, and half sticking out onto the road. The steering wheel and dashboard were all covered in vomit.

Thomas got the job of repairing Aunt Peggie's Ford Escort. He told Philip one day that he was fixing this cabbie for some chick. Philip found it very funny when he met Aunt Peggie to discover that Thomas referred to an old lady of over seventy as a "chick". It was with this car that I had another of my experiences of towing with Thomas. This time I insisted on driving the Barracuda while he drove the Escort. I did not know that it had no brakes. While heading downhill along Nicolson Road, Thomas overtook me, shouting that I must go faster so that I could keep in front of him. Instead of doing this, I turned up the next side road, Deodar Avenue. This solved the problem since we were now going uphill. At the intersection of McDonald Road, the towrope broke. Fortunately the Escort was on the fairly level part in the middle of McDonald Road and so did not run away. We fixed the rope, and got the car to the pits.

We went to Barnetts scrap yard to get some piece for the brakes of the Escort. Thomas told the salesman that he wanted a master cylinder for a Ford Escort, and agreed on the price of R50. We then went and removed the part from a car. When we went back to the counter to pay, the man there freaked out, and said that what we had there was much more than only the master

cylinder. He argued with us, for a while, but eventually shouted at us "All right! You can take it for only R50, but don't ever come back here again!" I thought that this was a very strange way to do business with your clients! At some later date we were talking to Amos, and he told us about an argument that he had with the man at Barnetts. Amos told us that "the velly bad man at Bunits" had told him "Not you cummee back again, you cummee back again, me shoottoo you!" So it seems that that bloke at Barnetts had a habit of telling his customers to go away and not come back again.

Thomas spent quite a bit of time working on the Escort. One day when I was at the pits with him he wanted to show me that it was going. The bonnet was open, and I was standing looking at the engine while he was sitting in it trying to start it. To me it did not look like it was going to start, and I could see petrol spraying out from somewhere near the carburettor. I told him this. He got out of the car, and did some things in the engine. He told me to get in and try to start it, while he was looking at the engine. This I did, and after a short while the engine, very roughly, burst into life, and the bonnet slammed down onto his head. Some days after that, after he had done some work on the car, Philip was with him at the pits, and he decided that the car was ready to go for a test drive. They both got into the car and headed off. They got as far as the bottom of the car park when the engine burst into flames. Using sand, water, wet rags, and whatever else was available they managed to extinguish the flames. If I remember correctly, the project of fixing Aunt Peggie's Ford Escort was abandoned after that.

Thomas got to know John Haynes after the car theft episode with Gavin. Thomas had pursuaded John to put up the money to buy an Audi 80. The idea was the usual one, that Thomas would fix it up, and then they could sell it for a profit. It was a fairly nice looking car for the price paid for it, only a few hundred rand. It was silver, with brown upholstery and had automatic transmission. I took it for a drive with Thomas to town just after he got it. We were going down Berea Road, and I wanted to overtake a bus. I used the kickdown, and when I looked in the rearview mirror, all I saw was a huge cloud of smoke. This was apparently caused by a fault in some connection between the transmission and the engine which was resulting in transmission fluid being sucked into the manifold.

Over a period of a few months Thomas kept going to John and asking for more money for the car. When the total got to R1048, John came to the conclusion that all the money had been spent on hamburgers for Thomas, and none on fixing the car, and he refused to hand out any more. The car was left to rot in the university car park. It was vandalised, and eventually taken by the university and dumped in the open space next to the Old Mutual Sports Hall, along with some other of John's cars including the R4.

The floor of the pits was covered in sawdust. Being a pyromaniac, Thomas had for a long time wanted to set fire to this. Being well soaked in oil it would make a nice fire. A night early in January, before the university term had started, when the campus was fairly deserted seemed a good time to do this. Unfortunately, while enjoying his fire, he decided that he wanted to get a better

The Audi (that John bought), BMW, Jetta, and Barracuda

The same line-up with me standing in the middle (The photographer was Thomas)

view of the smoke from it, so he turned on the overhead lights in the pits. The lights illuminated the smoke so well that not only Thomas and I got a better view of it, but so did a passing security guard, who was attracted by the sight. Thomas tried explaining to him that he had lost one of his spanners in the sawdust, and was burning it to find his spanner. Despite the explanation, the security guard insisted that we put out the fire.

Shortly after I started to get involved with Catherine - in fact I think that it was actually the first time that I had taken her for a night out - we went out with Thomas to Shirley's place (she was still staying in Currie Road then). Thomas had that strange dude that John picked up on one of his trips to Johannesburg staying with him. He was carrying a large stash of hash. Shirley had some vodka and Thomas was dopping it. After consuming a fair amount of vodka he started talking about some American weightlifter called Robbie Robinson. Apparently this person crushes coconuts with one hand. With the aid of the vodka, Thomas had extrapolated this to crushing oke's heads. When it got very late, and was long past time to go, the rate at which Thomas was drinking was incredibly slow, the idea being that we could not leave until he had finished his drink. He was going on and on about how Robbie Robinson will crush the head of any oke who tunes him shit, and about how certain he was that the cabbie driven by Robbie Robinson was a V8. Eventually he managed to finish the vodka (the bottle and glass were both empty), and Shirley got us out of her flat. Catherine and I had got as far as the pavement, where the Barracuda was parked, and Thomas was bringing up the rear still talking to Shirley. While we waited for Thomas to catch up, I decided that this was a good opportunity to "grip the chick" (as Thomas would have put it). I proceeded to do so, but unfortunately before I got very far, Thomas was right behind us, and began pissing on the pavement just as I was about to kiss Catherine. I did not get as far as kissing her. The moment had rather been spoilt, and we both started laughing. We got into the Barracuda, and Thomas set off like a maniac. I was rather relieved when we ran out of petrol a short distance along the road. Thomas, master of free-wheeling that he was, managed to get all the way to Moore Road Service Station. There he managed to negotiate something with the petrol attendant and syphoned gas from a crashed Ford Granada parked there.

Later on, after I had taken Catherine home, I found Thomas and friend parked in the Prof JV Haynes Carpark (as we had named the place in honour of the number of places taken up in it by John's vehicle collection) smoking some of the zoll. I joined them in the smoke filled car while they finished off the joint - I did not join them in the activity. It was then decided that we should go for a drive. Just as Tom had started the car, a student came wandering down the path from above the car park - he was on his way through the car park to one of the residences on the other side of the road below the car park (Ernest Jansen Hall). Tom drove the Barracuda straight for the chap. He stepped out of the way acting as though it was a joke, and carried on straight through the car shelters. By the time he had come through the rows of car shelters and was crossing the next lane of the car park, we had also reached that lane, and once again Tom accelerated and drove towards him. He jumped out the way, and headed off across the grass. We got around the first corner in the road below the car park just as the same student was crossing the road, Tom accelerated and the

student gave us a startled look and ran away. Tom laughed and said "Scheme that like the fucking oke schemes that the Mafia have put a fucking hit contract out on him. He keeps seeing this big evil looking fucking cabbie coming for him!"

Long after one night before Rag Day float building session, there was still a rubbish tip full of debris from this activity left in the middle of the science complex carpark. After a few weeks, this obstruction in my carpark was beginning to piss me off, so I decided that it needed to be sorted out. I decided that the thing needed to be set fire to. Who better to contract for the job than Thomas? He was always keen for a good fire. Late one Saturday night a group of about four of us arrived in the carpark. Thomas set off and accomplished his mission, and then we went up to Shepstone building to level five or six and watched the fire from a place that was far enough away, but from where we had a good view. Early in the next week the thing had been removed from the carpark.

At the beginning of one semester, when the residences were not open, I was looking for a place to spend a few nights. John Haynes said that I could stay in his room for a night or two, since he was going to be away in Johannesburg. He said that we should just go and ask his landlady first. John took me to meet Mrs Savy. She said that it was quite alright for me to stay in John's room while he was away, as long as there was "no nonsense". I just said "yes" to this, deciding that it would be better not to ask exactly what she meant by "nonsense". Over the next few years, when I saw and heard about what was going on in her place, I began to wonder more and more what she could have meant by this "No nonsense!" - she had homosexuals staying there and bringing fellow homosexuals picked up on the beachfront home for sessions of buggery, a prostitute staying there (although I don't think that she actually brought her business there) and drug addicts staying there who not only took drugs, but at one stage had marijuana growing in the back of her garden. (ALL of these things were highly ILLEGAL in South Africa at that time!)

For quite a while after Catherine and I were going out together, Thomas was the only friend of mine that she knew. Catherine thought Thomas was very weird, and had asked me what my other friends were like. So one weekend I took her to meet Neil. When we arrived at the house, Neil's father opened the door. He went off to look for Neil, and came back to tell us that Neil was in the bath or something (I don't remember exactly) and that he would be coming soon. Mr Barrett invited us to sit in the lounge to wait. Mr Barrett, I am sure, never had much to say to his son's friends, and so the three of us just sat there, looking at each other, and around the room, and out the window, in one of those uncomfortable silences that exist when nobody knows what to say to anybody else. After a while Neil appeared. I had not warned Catherine about how he looked - he had a lot of long and untidy dark brown hair, and a bushy beard. He wore glasses. The overall effect was that all you saw were a pair of glasses and a nose in amongst a mess of hair. On entering the room, Neil immediately realised what the situation in the room was, and so after nodding a brief greeting, sat down and joined in the uncomfortable silence. Catherine was still too shocked by his appearance to say anything. After enjoying the situation for a while, Neil laughed, and said "Come on, let's go". The three of us left the uncomfortable silence behind with Mr Barrett in the lounge and went probably either outside

Catherine posing with the Jetta

or to Neil's room, I don't recall exactly where. I think that we ended up at the La Lucia Mall that day. Later, after we had left Neil she asked me "Don't you have any friends who are normal people?" I told her that perhaps it would be a good idea if she met Martin. Like Thomas, Martin was also a German from Northern Rhodesia. She obviously did find Martin "normal" enough, because after Catherine and I had broken up, she and Martin became a couple.

At one of the garages down on Gale Street, when Thomas and I were there, we saw a wreck of a BMW 2800 sitting there. The body did not look all that bad, it was just very dirty, and it had all four wheels, but it had no engine, no bonnet, and just about everything from inside was missing. There were no seats, no instrument panel, and no carpets. It had been brought in for repair, but then the owner could not afford to pay the bill, so the garage just kept the car, and used it for spares - hence all the missing pieces. Thomas bought the car, for some ridiculously small sum, with the plan of fixing it up and selling it. He had it towed up to the University carpark, where he cleaned it up, and started working on it. He did not get very far with the restoration, and after a while just sold the car for scrap. He did make a profit on it.

In the process of scheming about fixing this car, Thomas did find out who the ex-owner was, a Mr Alex Ngcobu who worked at the King Edward Hospital. Thomas got in contact with him, and found that he now had another red 2800, almost identical to this one that Thomas now had. Thomas did get the job of servicing Alex's new car.

I was with Thomas one day when he was fixing Alex Ngcobu's BMW 2800. I went with him to find Alex in the hospital, and get the keys from him. We then took the car back to the pits to work on it. It was running very roughly,

The BMW that Thomas bought

Thomas working on Alex Ngcobu's BMW

and misfired all the way. Thomas did some work on the distributor, points and spark-plugs, and then we took it for a test drive out to Greyville and back. It was performing considerable better after Thomas had finished working on it.

Thomas had some clients in Umlazi, and used to go out there to fix cars, or sometimes bring cars from Umlazi to work on at the pits, or near his home - like in the Davenport Centre carpark. One time, during one of the periods of unrest in Lamontville, he had run out of petrol there on the way home. He was heading off with his can and pipe in search of some, when he encountered a black man smoking. He greeted the pekkie oke "Howzit, Chief!" and asked him "Scheme like, can you score us a smoke?" Thomas told me afterwards that he had handed a cigarette over, and with a murderous look in his eyes, and in a really nasty tone said "This is the last time!"

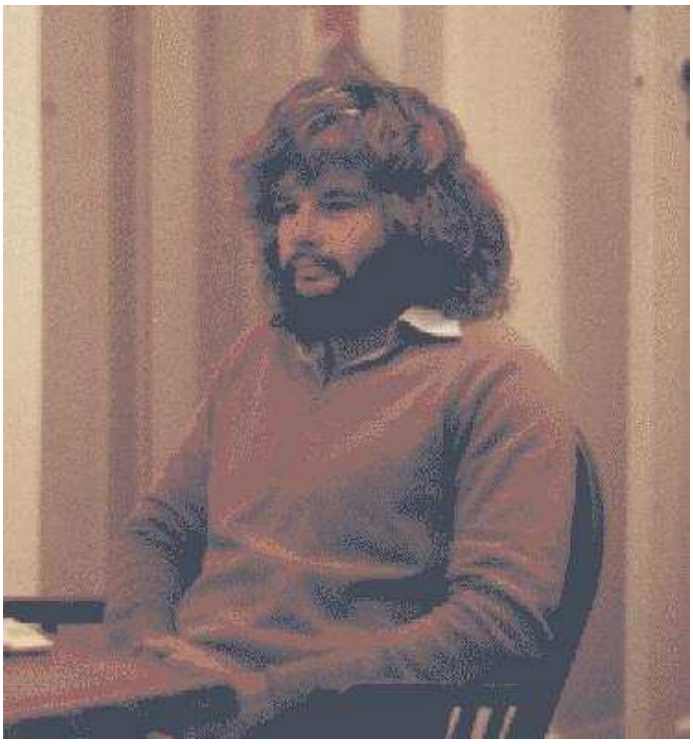
One night Thomas asked me to take him out to Umlazi. I can't remember the reason why he could not get there in his car. The place we were going to was the house where Amos lived, although Amos was not the client. Once we got into Umlazi itself, and off tarred roads with street lights, Thomas somehow managed to navigate the way to Amos' house, which I found amazing since all the roads, and all the houses looked the same, and the place was like a maze. After the business was done we stayed for a while and talked. Thomas and I were probably the only two Whites in the whole of Umlazi that night. I was subsequently told by someone that it was actually illegal for us to be there without some sort of permit. One of the members of the household was sent out to buy some beer - which was something that should not have been possible in South Africa at that time of night. The laws in South Africa at that time only allowed the sale of alcohol from bottle stores during certain very restrictive hours. Anyway, the man came back with a number of litre bottles of beer. Thomas and most of the others were drinking. I did not have any, and neither did Amos. After a while Thomas was talking to a group in the middle of the room, and I was at one side, with some very drunk young man, who worked at the Hyper-Rama unloading boxes, sitting next to me talking unintelligible garbage. Suddenly there was silence from the part of the room where Thomas was. One of the Zulus was saying "Ah ah ah ah, you can't say things like that!" After we left, I asked Thomas what it was that he had said to cause the upset, and he responded "All I said was that I sharp kaffir beer!"

When I suggested that we leave, since it was getting late, Thomas disagreed, since he was having such fun getting drunk. Amos agreed with me that it was time for us to go, which resulted in Thomas arguing with Amos, and trying to throw him out of his own house. After this, he was persuaded to leave, more or less by majority rule. I don't remember what time it was when we left, but it must have been before midnight because I remember that we went to visit my girlfriend Catherine on the way back, since it was sort of on the way.

One evening, during the week, I went with Martin (on his bike) to visit Neil. We decided to go out and persuaded Mr Barrett to lend us the car (the Peugeot 504). He had thrown the keys at me, saying that I was now responsible for the car, which was not insured (I was the only one with a licence to drive a car). We collected Tom somewhere along the way. We went to the Wagon Wheels Hotel. Thomas had a few beers as well as ordering a packet of cigarettes. He had no money, and Martin ended up paying for most of it.

When we decided to go, Thomas had an almost full beer. He tried to take it away with him, but the security guard would not let him. He downed the thing and gave the bottle to the security guard. Just after he got into Neil's mother's car he threw up, and immediately insisted that he had only burped. We then went back to Tom's porsie where he cleaned the car.

By this time Neil was getting concerned about the amount of petrol that we had been using in his mother's car. The suggestion was made that Thomas fetch his can and pipe so that he could do some syphoning. He got them and we left again. After that we did not know where to go. Thomas insisted that there was always a party at Old Boy's Club (this being DHS Old Boy's Club in Durban



Neil Barrett

North). We drove all the way out there to find the place totally deserted. He insisted that this must be the first night in history on which they had not had a party there.

Neil then said that we should get some petrol, but Thomas refused to syphon until we actually ran out. Neil and Thomas then started arguing and fighting. Neil decided that it was time to take Thomas back to his home. Thomas did not like this idea, since he was in the mood for some partying. At some time during the evening Thomas had been feeling cold and had borrowed my jacket. When I asked him to return it to me, since I had to return home on Martin's motorcycle, he took it off and threw it violently into the car. Neil said that we must drive off quickly before he attacked the car. As we were driving off we saw him throwing his can onto the road.

One time I was at Catherine's flat with Tom and my brother. We were on our way out, and were waiting for the lift. Philip, Catherine and their mother lived on the eighth floor of a block of flats. Looking over the edge of the building we could see some people walking outside the building. The suggestion of spitting on them was made - not by Tom, as one might expect, but by my brother. Whether or not my brother was really seriously intending to do this, I don't know, perhaps he said it just to shock some people, which he truly succeeded in doing! Tom however, responded to the suggestion with much enthusiasm "Ja! Ja! Scheme like how's we fucking gob on the fucking okes down there!" And the

The Spitting Duo (in the Prof JV Haynes Carpark)

two of them proceeded to have a spitting competition, shooting over the edge of the building, and then ducking down behind the wall. Catherine was stunned! She would expect that type of thing from Thomas, but had she not been there, she would never have believed that my brother would do such a thing.

One of the things that Thomas managed to get hold of while staying in the backgarden was an XT500 offroad motorcycle. This, after he had had it for many months, and it was still in an unroadworthy state, he managed to sell to Martin. Martin's Suzuki 400 had broken down. Thomas was fixing it for him, but there was a problem getting some of the parts for it, so Martin was without transport. Martin got into trouble with the police a few times for riding around on the XT500, since it was unregistered and unlicenced as well as being unfit to be on the road.

One day Thomas came to visit me at the Centre for Applied Social Studies where I was working. He arrived with a litre bottle of Black Label. A black fellow who worked in the Social Studies department was in the office with us. Thomas addressed him "Howzit, Chief!" and offered him some beer. He politely refused the offer. A little later, after Thomas had left, he was talking about some trouble he was having with his Datsun. Philip said that Thomas was a mechanic and would fix his car for him. He replied "You can't trust any old Tom, Dick or Harry to work on your car!".

During the period that I was involved with Fiona, I hardly had much to do with Tom at all. This was coincidence, and nothing to do with Fiona, I remember that Fiona never actually met Tom. The only time that they enountered each other, was one day when Fiona and I were in my Jetta, and we were turning right at the intersection of Nicholson and McDonald Roads, and Tom was in his Barracuda, also turning right at that intersection, but going in the opposite direction. We passed each other in the middle of the intersection, and both tuned each other "Howzit!". She said afterwards, that she thought that we were going to stop and have a conversation in the middle of the intersection.

One night while driving along Nicholson Road I saw Thomas and the Barracuda on the side of the road. I stopped to talk to him. He had two schoolgirls with him, one called Alice, friends of Neil's sister. He invited me to go to a nite club at the LA Hotel with him (Slipper's Boogey Palace). He had several drinks while we were there. When we left it was raining. Thomas always insisted that the Barras went much better after he had had a few drinks. He was driving rather fast, in order to impress Alice and her friend. At the corner of Moore and Essenwood, as we approached the intersection the lights turned red. Thomas jumped onto the brakes. Due to the wet road and the smooth tyres there was no way that we could stop. We ended going through the intersection almost sideways. Fortunately, there was no traffic coming the other way. Alice said: "For fucks sake, Thomas, drive like a fucking human being!". Thomas' response to this was that he knew what he was doing because he used to be a rally driver in the early 1970's. He drove a lot slower the rest of the way.

It was in early October, when I got involved with a new girlfriend. Shortly after I met her, I took her to meet Thomas. We went to his porsie in the back garden late one night. We had been to Shirley's flat before that, and she had given us some food for the cat. The new girlfriend did not get to meet him that night, since he would not open the door. He had been out drinking with Dave de Lange earlier on, and was not feeling very well. When I knocked on the door, all he would say was "Aaaaah, fuck off! Look, like, I'm feeling fucked, so fuck off!" I tried "We have got some food for the cat", but his response was "Just leave the food by the door, and fuck off, I'm feeling fucking fucked, so fuck off!" So we left the food by the door and left.

Thomas' brother, Pete organized a flat for Thomas, i.e. he signed the lease for the flat and paid the rent. This was necessary due to the fact that no estate agent would have had a lease with him due to his lack of employment. Tom and the cat moved from the room in the back garden into the flat. It was a furnished bachelor flat on the first floor of a small block, there were only six flats in the building. It was a fairly nice flat with a kitchen, bathroom, reasonable large main room with a balcony, and included a garage under the building. There was a telephone as well. This was often cut off due to nonpayment of the bill (Pete did not pay that), and the number kept changing, since every time when he had managed to save up to pay the outstanding bill, and apply for reconnection, they would give him a new number.

The Barracuda died one night (early hours of the morning) on the Victo-

The Flat that Pete Organised

Thomas and his Cat in the Flat that Pete Organised

ria Embankment. The wheel fell off. Neil and his sister were in the car with Thomas.

After the demise of the Barracuda, Thomas had a white Mercedes 280 which he used for a fairly long time, while he was fixing it up to sell. He also had a blue one at around the same time, which he worked on for quite a while before it was ready to sell.

One evening I went to visit Shirley, and found Neil and Thomas there when I arrived. It was obvious that they were annoying Shirley. I suggested that we "shoot from this porsie" in order to give Shirley a break. Thomas had the VW Beetle that he was fixing for some chick called Camilla. We set off in this, I was in the back, Thomas driving and Neil in the front with him. It was only after we were heading off down the road that I realized that they were both very drunk. As we headed off along Brand Road, Neil produced a 5 litre box of wine and started drinking from it. After we had crossed Davenport Road, Thomas decided that it was not fair that Neil have all the wine, and demanded his share. He took the box away from Neil and started drinking out of it, thus breaking the rule "don't drink and drive". I said to Thomas, "Watch out for that tree over there!". He did not pay any attention to me, and the tree stepped out in front of us. We did not hit the tree head on, but at a glancing blow along the side of the car, this deflected the car towards the side of the road, where we went straight into the back of a parked Ford pickup (which had a chromed towbar on the back). As we collided the alarm in the Ford went off, the hooter in the VW got stuck on, Thomas' head hit the steering wheel and Neil's head knocked the windshield out (neither of them were in the habit of using seatbelts). I had seen the collision coming and so had held on to the back of the rear seat bracing myself for it, and came out alright. As we crawled out of Camilla's car, a large Portuguese family who lived in the house and owned the truck came out, and were all shouting at the same time, as is usual for the species. Thomas' face was bleeding, and the alarm and hooter were still going off. The Portuguese owner of the truck turned off his alarm, and the battery of the Beetle was disconnected. Thomas then asked for a drink of water. He told me afterwards that he did this because drinking water reduces the reading that the police get when testing for alcohol. Fortunately the police did not arrive. Inspecting the damage, it was seen that most of it was on the Beetle, the chrome plating on the towbar of the Ford was damaged, and subsequently Thomas paid for this to be repaired.

We then had to get the car back to Tom's porsie. The windshield was loaded into the back, and the car was started, the main problem was that the hooter was permanently on. We stopped around the corner, on Cromwell Road and attempted to disconnect it, but were not successful since the part that was shorting was in the crumpled part of the front of the car. People in the flats were shouting at us to shutup, obviously thinking that we were making the noise for fun. We gave up and drove all the way via the back roads, hooting all the way.

A day or two after the accident, Camilla phoned to ask when her car would be ready. Thomas told her "Next Friday.". This he thought, gave him enough time to make some plan. However, before the next Friday, Camilla arrived, uninvited at the flat, and saw (what was left of) her car parked around the

Camilla's Car

Camilla's Car

back. According to Thomas she became extremely unreasonable, freaked out and started screaming and shouting. Thomas had to offer to buy the car from her at a reasonable (for her) price. Thomas managed to get this money from his brother Pete.

One of the boyfriends of Tom's sister, had a VW pickup which he wanted to sell. He gave it to Tom to sell. He was obviously in no hurry for the money, since he did not seem to mind the fact that Tom kept it, and used it for a long time before actually selling it. It was a white 1500 VW pickup with registration SS 1917. Tom used it to make some money with scrap metal. He would drive around in it looking for anything metallic. He would load whatever he found on the back of the truck, and go and sell it at the scrap metal dealers Capital Waste on Gale Street. The one day that I was with him we went to the Open Air School, near the university, since he had seen an old air conditioner in the carpark there. We had pulled in to the carpark, and were getting out of the vehicle, when a man came out of the building, and asked us what we wanted. Tom told him that we had come to take the air conditioner away. The man said that he knew nothing about it being taken away. Tom told him that he had arranged it with Mr van Tonder. The man told us to leave it alone, and headed back into the building. "What do we do now?", I asked Tom. "Take the air conditioner" he said. I helped him load it onto the truck, we got in and drove off. As we were driving off I asked him about what he had arranged with Mr van Tonder, he told me that he did not know any Mr van Tonder, he said "I just made it up to tune something to the fucking oke who was tuning us."

Thomas got involved with somebody called Neal through some connection of his mother. This guy had some plans for an inline water heater which he and Thomas were going to go into business making. They got as far as getting a plastic moulding company to make the cases. At one stage Thomas had a large number of these plastic cylinders in the cupboard in his flat. The project did not get very far though, since they could not get SABS approval for it, due to the risk of electrocution inherent in the design. Neal also liked the scrap metal idea, and got involved with this as well.

The one day when I went to visit Thomas, I found his flat had been vacated. When I contacted Neil Barrett, he told me that Thomas had left the country. Thomas and this other fellow, had been caught collecting a very large quauntity of "scrap" metal from a construction site. Thomas had gone back to Germany to avoid the case that was being brought against Neal for theft of building material from the construction site. The cat had been left at the Barrett's house, but had disappeared after a day or two, never to be seen again.

By the time I had discovered that he had disappeared, he had already been gone a few weeks, and it was not long afterwards that he was back again. Once again he had not managed to stay very long in Germany. He had stayed with his father, grandmother, and a few other relatives, with each one for as long as he could until he had been thrown out. He then tried going to England to look for work, but had little success with that there. He had then spent a few nights sleeping at the airport waiting for his flight back to South Africa, attracting attention from the security guards. On his arrival back in Durban,

he was homeless, and all he had was a single suitcase of possessions. He was wandering around trying everybody he knew to give him a place to stay. As was the case with his relatives in Germany, he did not manage to stay in one place for very long. He eventually managed to get a room in the house of some mad friend of a friend of Shirley. That was where he was when I lost contact with him.